

## Address given by Graham Watson on the achievements of the Luxembourg Presidency of the Council of the European Union (Brussels, 22 June 2005)

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[Graham Watson] Thank you, Mr President. President-in-Office, if the Luxembourg presidency has failed your expectations, I hope you will not blame yourself. President-in-Office, Liberals and Democrats in this House applaud your attempts to keep the EU show on the road. You tried hard to strike the deals Europe needs. Your lack of success was not for lack of effort. Your final summit was doomed from the moment France voted to reject the Constitution. The triumphalism of the no voters, however, will be short lived. In Greek tragedy, actors often deepen their own plight while believing that their actions will help them to escape it. So is the case with the French oppositionnistes and the Socialists who were their cheerleaders. Their votes will bring to bear the very changes they most fear. At least in Greek tragedy the audience is permitted to understand what is happening. That luxury is available to many of us only with hindsight some time after the referenda. I suspect that you, President-in-Office, through your passionate commitment to the European cause, which I welcome, were unable to stand back and look objectively at the impact on your presidency of the week of 29 May 2005. Had you done so you might have looked upon that week as a defining moment in the history of a European Union that will never be the same again. Hence your final summit was characterised not by the pockets of resistance of which you spoke optimistically, but by a fight between two ailing dinosaurs, Britain and France. Unable to admit that national sovereignty is a luxury of the past, they persist in trying to impose their order on others. Britain seeks a British Europe rather than a European Britain. France is just as insular without the excuse of being an island. Both harbour a dangerous illusion, for there can be only one Europe, truly European. That Europe must have the necessary funding to function. The insistence by some Member States on one per cent of GNI would deprive us of the Lisbon investment, as indeed your final proposal might have done. It is perhaps better to have no agreement and to re-think both how we raise money and how we spend it, than to reach agreement at any cost. But to those who seek to use these setbacks to re-establish an iron curtain, I would quote Robert Schuman, who said in 1949: I have no intention of drawing a geographical line of demarcation between Europe and non-Europe. There is another way of setting limits: that which distinguishes those who have the European spirit and those who have not. President-in-Office, the Franco-German motor of European integration on which your presidency relied is kaput. We need another motor to replace it. It must be neither British nor French. The Union must recognise that it has moved on from reconciliation and security of food supply to other demands of a rapidly changing world: a world that will not wait for Europe. So do not allow this pause for reflection to be a period of paralysis. Go home and make sure you win your referendum. Then mobilise the other smaller states to prevent the prehistoric predators from destroying what has been built. Take satisfaction from the achievements of your presidency: the agreement on the Euro-vignette for transport infrastructure charging; the action plan for The Hague Programme; the agreement on a European driving licence; and, with luck, even the elusive Members Statute to demonstrate the maturity of this House. All of these mark good progress for the Union, and you may well conclude that you are left with more than just an overflowing ashtray. As Aristotle taught us, we may not always achieve our goals, but it is our pur

suit of them that changes the course of history.